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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 6503
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1618
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 000056

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SUBJECT: CONSTITUTION DRAFTING ASSEMBLY FORMED

REF: 06 BANGKOK 7490 (FIELD NARROWS)

Classified By: Political Officer David R. Greenberg, reason: 1.4 (d).

¶1. (U) On January 1, a royal command appointing the 100 members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) came into force. The 100 members, selected by the Council for National Security (CNS) from a field of 200 short-listed by the National People's Assembly (reftel), will have 180 days from the date of their first meeting to complete a draft constitution, subsequently to be submitted for a referendum. Thailand's interim constitution provides that, should the CDA fail to meet this deadline, the CDA "shall cease to function and the (CNS) shall hold a joint meeting with the Council of Ministers to consider and revise one of the previously promulgated Constitutions... within thirty days as from the date of the referendum..."

¶2. (U) The CDA consists of 20 representatives of the private sector, 19 academics, 16 representatives of the social sector and media, 16 representatives of public sector and state enterprises, nine former Senators and representatives of independent agencies, eight local politicians, eight judges and former constitution drafters, and four provincial governors. Two of these members are former police Generals, one is a former Navy Admiral. The CDA will soon choose 25 people to serve on a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). Although the interim constitution states that these 25 do not need to be members of the CDA, the widespread presumption is that the CDA will choose from its own membership. The CNS then will appoint 10 other CDC members. On December 20, the cabinet endorsed a royal decree stipulating that the CNS's 10 appointees must have a background in charter writing.

¶3. (C) Comment: CNS Chairman General Sonthi Boonyaratglin has publicly expressed a preference for including certain provisions in the next constitution. Given the CNS's dominant role in selecting the members of the CDA, it appears likely that the CDA will accord significant weight to CNS views. We believe that Thai civil society will pay close attention to CDA deliberations, however, and that CDA members cannot easily disregard popular sentiment on controversial issues. We will follow the CDA's work with great interest.
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